

Book Talk :
RECORDS CARRY BLIND "READERS"
THROUGH NOVELS AND POETRY
WITHOUT BRAILLE

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HOUSE FOR THE BLIND**

not be larger than a mustard-seed, would eliminate epilepsy from the race."

There is no way known to science of changing the chemistry of so small a unit of the body as the gene. No scientist, in fact, has seen a gene. It is so infinitesimal that its very existence, like that of the electron, has been postulated to explain facts which could be answered in no other way. Genes have been mutilated successfully by X-ray treatment, but such a method offers no hope of controlling end-results.

The electroencephalogram, or brain-wave chart, is a comparatively new tool of psychiatry.

Electrodes clamped to the outside of the human head measure the electric potential of the brain in terms of millionths of a volt. The current generated by a nerve-impulse lasts about a thousandth of a second, is insignificant in voltage, but proves that every human being has a mysterious sort of electric dynamo inside his skull.

Discoveries—Other convention high lights: Swindlers and confidence men often are foppish, fashionably dressed, even effeminate, Drs. Walter Bromberg and Sylvan Keiser reported after making a psychological study of swindlers in New York's Court of General Sessions. The swindler is psychologically akin to the seducer, stimulating the fantasy of victims by offering an outlet for wishes known to be illicit.

Excessive use of bromids and barbiturate drugs, sold without restriction in most States, can lead to mental symptoms requiring hospital care, Dr. Frank J. Curran warned. Barbiturates such as luminal and veronal are cumulative in their effects on the body, should be used cautiously.

Dr. Stuart N. Rowe of Pittsburgh reported the case of a woman who had the entire right hemisphere of her brain removed, now lives with half a brain, her personality unaffected except for slight impairment of memory and mild emotional instability.

Abrupt withdrawal of drugs is all that is necessary to cure the average narcotic addict, Drs. Lawrence Kolb and C. K. Himmelsbach of the U. S. Public Health Service reported. In severe addiction, however, abrupt withdrawal is cruel, dangerous and unnecessary.

Chronic criminals aren't necessarily mentally defective; most of them merely display traits of acquisitiveness common to humanity, Dr. Charles B. Thompson concluded after studying 1,400 repeater criminals.

He found 89 per cent. of them mentally normal.

BOOKS TALK: Records Carry Blind "Readers" Through Novels and Poetry Without Braille

Reading is fast becoming a favorite relaxation of the blind.

Seventy-five per cent. of the nation's 120,000 sightless citizens never have learned how to read braille, the system of raised-dot printing for the blind. To them the fascinating world of literature was closed until science showed them how to read with the ears instead of with the eyes.



Courtesy American Foundation for the Blind

William Beebe records his adventures in a Talking Book for blind posterity

Through the Talking Book, a blind man can dip into literature with an ease to be envied by his sighted brother who must scan the printed page.

The Talking Book actually is not a book at all, but a special type of slow-playing phonograph-record which reads a book aloud to its auditor, often in the voice of the author, transporting story-telling back to its beginnings as a purely verbal art. This month the American Foundation for the Blind reports 16,000 Talking Book machines in use, hundreds more being manufactured for sale at cost by 300 blind WPA workers. Records also can be played on late model phonographs which can be slowed down to thirty-three revolutions a minute.

From the nearest of twenty-seven public libraries scattered through the country the blind reader can make his selection of 200 books thus far recorded and receive the records postage free through the mails. All he needs to do is to place the records in his reading-machine and sit back to listen to the persuasive voice of Alexander Woollcott giving vocal nuance to his best-seller, "While Rome Burns," to Dr. Raymond L. Ditmars's narrating the "Thrills of a Naturalist's Quest," to Dame Sybil Thorndike, Stephen Vincent Benét, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick and dozens of other well-known figures.

No Cinch—Making the recordings on twelve-inch Vitrolak records isn't a snap job. Talking Book records run for sixteen minutes; the average novel requires from twelve to fourteen records and runs for seven hours.

Titles are chosen by a committee of the Library of Congress, which sponsors the Talking Book.

The recorder, be he author or hired voice, sits at a desk facing a microphone. Close to his hand is a set of push-buttons for turning off the mechanism if he has to cough, swallow or clear his throat. Not a single error in the disk is tolerated; the reader must run on for sixteen minutes without a noticeable pause or a single tongue-slip. Temperament bursts into pyrotechnics at times when a tiny error in the

final announcement makes it necessary to do the entire sixteen-minute stretch over again. In the control-room one engineer works the dials, another follows the script word for word to catch any verbal flip-flops.

Talking Book patrons have their favorite readers. Most popular of all, according to his fan-mail, is John Knight, radio announcer. Velvet quality, changing inflections and even pace are sought-after qualities. Alwyn Bach and Fred Utell, also radio announcers, have talked numerous books into twelve-inch records. When authors themselves do not record their books, trained radio and stage actors are used for their superior ability to set a reading pace and maintain it.

Material—Novels, plays, short stories, essays, poetry and educational subjects are "published" at the rate of fifty-five recordings a week. Fiction is the most popular; such novels as "Riders of the Purple Sage," "Two Years Before the Mast," "The Sea Hawk," and "Lost Horizon" are way out in front.

Plays are recorded not by a single reader but by an entire cast.

Starting four years ago on an experimental basis, sponsors soon discovered that they would have to develop special machinery and special records. They hit on a plastic called Vitrolak, light and flexible, to make records suitable for the slowly revolving turntable of an electric reading-machine.

These machines are as portable as a suitcase and when blind customers are unable to buy them, the WPA project arranges to lend an instrument. The Carnegie Foundation and private individuals contribute funds for the work.

"Magnificent Obsession" runs to fourteen two-sided records; "Very Good, Jeeves," sixteen; "Lost Horizon," eleven, while "Woman in White" by Wilkie Collins comes in twenty-six records which give a solid fourteen hours of "reading." Margaret Mitchell's thousand-page best-seller, "Gone With the Wind," hasn't been tackled yet. Talking Book sponsors are just a little dismayed by the idea.

which usually is more respected than sunburn because its effects are immediate and critical. Usually produced by the direct action of sunlight on the head, sunstroke is a state of unconsciousness which must be quickly treated by a doctor. Forty per cent. of all sunstroke cases result in death within twenty-four or thirty-six hours. Midday is the critical time for sunstroke. Authorities say, "Wear a hat and avoid the direct rays of the sun."

Young men who shed their hats in the summer time, thinking that sunshine will benefit hair growth, probably are not laying themselves open to sunstroke, which usually strikes at elderly people not in the best of physical condition. On the other hand, the young men probably aren't giving their hair any benefit either, for extreme sunlight tends to dry the hair and make it brittle.

On the whole, the advice of sun-wise tropical residents seems to be summed up in the popular song, "Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun."

SICK BRAINS: Psychiatrists Study Mental Disorders That Afflict Thousands of Americans

Last night, 52 per cent. of all the hospital beds in the country were occupied by victims of mental disease.

To-day, 500,000 mental sufferers are locked behind the doors of 400 State and city institutions.

To-morrow, 1,000,000 children will flock to their little red schoolhouses unaware that they are destined to suffer a mental breakdown at some period of their lives.

This year 125,000 persons will become mentally sick, costing United States taxpayers \$1,000,000 a day.

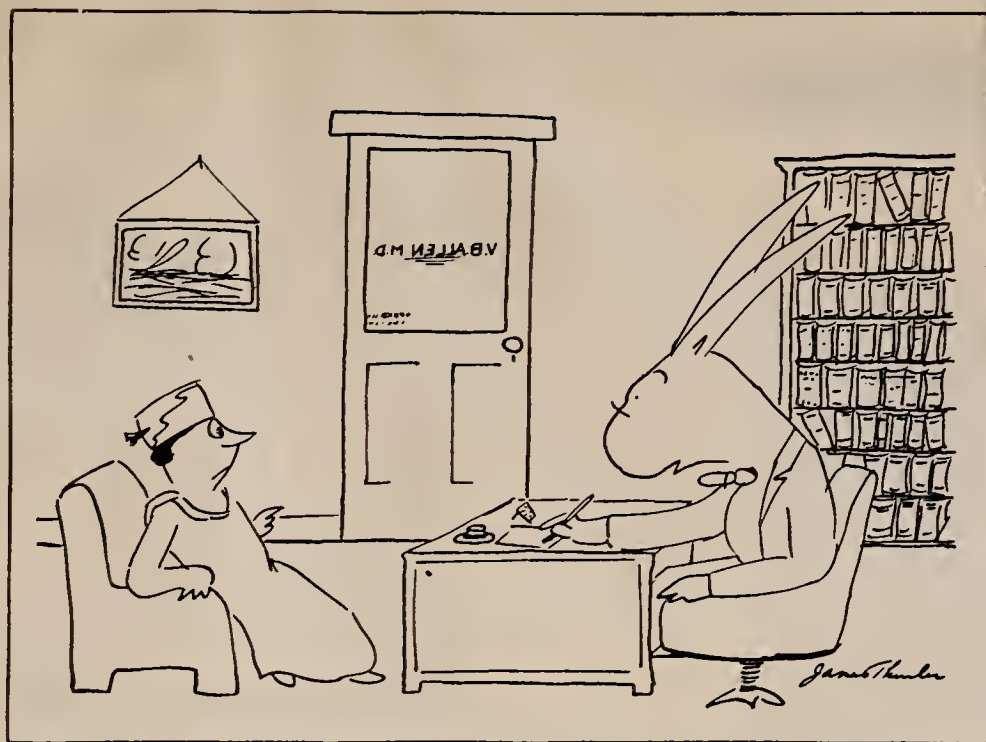
In New York City, 505 out of each 100,000 persons are mentally unwell.

Declaring that "mental hygiene is the most fruitful field in medicine to-day," the Rockefeller Foundation last year poured \$2,000,000 into researches on diseases of the mind.

Convention—These disturbing, shocking, cold-blooded statistics gave point last week to the ninety-third annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association at Pittsburgh. Two thousand specialists in nervous and mental diseases converged on the Hotel William Penn and devoted a six-day session to discussion of 100 papers probing into the dimness of shadowed minds. Aware that the lay public regards mental illness as something the other fellow has, specialists wasted little time in clanging the tocsin and realistically exchanged notes on the latest kinks in mental therapy.

The outstanding problem of psychiatry is dementia præcox, also called schizophrenia and sometimes adolescent insanity from its habit of developing in early life. Schizophrenia means split personality; not a *Jekyll* and *Hyde* schism, but the sundering of the emotions from the intellect. Characteristic symptoms are loss of interest, dulness, seclusiveness, indifference and gradual deterioration which may culminate in a purely vegetative existence.

Schizophrenia is by far the most common of mental ailments; it has been estimated that it accounts for 60 per cent. of mental-hospital patients. No one knows what



"YOU SAID A MOMENT AGO THAT EVERYBODY YOU LOOK AT SEEMS TO BE A RABBIT. NOW JUST WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT, MRS. SPRAGUE?"

—By Thurber in The New Yorker

causes it. Examination of the brains of victims usually shows them to be physically unimpaired. Between 30,000 and 40,000 persons come under the schizophrenic shadow every year. About a third of them recover.

Cure?—Most startling psychiatric development during the past year has been the insulin-shock treatment for schizophrenia. A specific for this mental illness would be relatively as important as a cure for heart-disease, cancer and pneumonia in the field of general medicine. Widely but inaccurately heralded as a positive cure for a previously incurable disease, insulin shock has been the subject of feverish experiment in leading mental hospitals. Last week's convention had an opportunity to evaluate results: Insulin shock is not a cure for all cases of dementia præcox, but may win its place as a useful form of treatment for the disease.

In 1933, Dr. Manfred Sakel of Vienna began experimenting with the injection of insulin into dementia præcox victims. Insulin is the hormone of the pancreas whose deficiency causes diabetes. Just how massive doses of insulin are sometimes able to club sick brains into a state of health is not completely understood, even by experts who obtain results with the method. But the amazing cures effected by Sakel, in some cases, led to experiments with the treatment in the United States.

Insulin-shock therapy is relatively simple. The first step is to determine the shock dose—the quantity required to produce a marked effect on the brain. The arms and legs jerk and twitch, perspiration breaks out, breathing becomes hard and the nervous system reacts so violently that some patients must be strait-jacketed.

Method—The patient gets his insulin shock before breakfast every day, six days a week. He spends the morning kicking, squirming and thrashing about. At noon sugar or glucose, which counteracts the insulin shock as effectively as turning off a switch, is fed to him. The patient comes out of his miseries with a raging appetite

and apparently in normal possession of his faculties. Treatment is repeated for three months. Some cases fail to show improvement until the end of the third month; others respond almost immediately. Doctors want to believe in the wide-spread usefulness of insulin-shock therapy, but are waiting non-committally until enough case-histories accumulate.

Epilepsy is a mental illness which costs the nation \$12,000,000 a year for institutional care, is the more dreaded because it is one of the mystery afflictions of mankind. More than 500,000 Americans suffer from it, as many as the victims of diabetes or active tuberculosis. Most feared by the epileptic are the fits or seizures which come on without warning, fling the victim to the ground in convulsive, mouth-foaming spasms, often cause him to chew his tongue raw unless he can insert a biting stick between his teeth.

Brain-wave records (charts of the minute electric currents generated in the cortex of the brain) indicate that the normal rhythm of the brain's electrical activity takes a terrific trouncing during an epileptic seizure. Dr. William G. Lennox of Harvard Medical School, top-hole expert on epilepsy, told the convention that what is needed to prevent the dreaded fits is something to stabilize the rate of the brain's activity. This might be done by changing the body chemistry, as, for instance, by increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in the exhaled breath of the patient. More startling to his audience was Doctor Lennox' suggestion that epilepsy can be eliminated if science will only show how to change the chemistry of the genes, the cargo-carriers of heredity for epilepsy and other qualities.

Scheme—"There is evidence that genes are chemical substances, perhaps a single large organic molecule," Doctor Lennox said. "In the end, we must eliminate this molecule or learn to alter its chemical structure. It is a tantalizing thought that the replacement of, say, a potassium for a sodium ion on a certain molecule, the total bulk of which for all persons living would

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